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SUBJECT: MFA UNDER SECRETARY MEETS NDU DELEGATION

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: MFA Under Secretary Abdullah Rashid Al Noaimi met May 14 with Ambassador and a visiting delegation from the National Defense University's (NDU) National War College and reviewed the UAE's security concerns, and the political reform trends that are under way in the region. Al Noaimi said terrorism tops the list of threats facing the UAE, but added that the UAE had thus far "contained" the threat with the cooperation of the U.S. and allies. Iraq's current instability, Iran's military and nuclear ambitions, and the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict, all potentially threaten the UAE's way of life. In response to a question about the USG's Freedom Agenda, Al Noaimi said that the U.S. should encourage indigenous political reform in the region. End Summary.

2. (U) A delegation from the NDU's National War College led by NDU President Lt. General Michael Dunn, including former U.S. Ambassador to the UAE, Marcelle Wahba, visited Abu Dhabi and Dubai May 12-16. The group's "Field Studies in National Security" program included meetings with government officials, think tanks, UAE and American business people, advocates for women's rights, media professionals, and several Emirati alumni from NDU's Near East and South Asia Center seminars. On May 14, Ambassador introduced the group to MFA Under Secretary Abdullah Rashid Al Noaimi.

#### Threats to UAE's Security

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3. (C) Al Noaimi chose the threats to the UAE's national security as the main theme for his briefing to the National War College group. The UAE, he said, is faced with several major threats:

-- Terrorism: The UAE's principal threat, terrorism would have a "very high impact" on the country's economy and political stability. While there had been terror threats against UAE interests, the country had been spared any incidents. Emiratis live in "a neighborhood of threats," citing Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Yemen, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. There are elements in these countries that would like to harm governments in the region. The UAE is an "open" country that terrorists use as a transit point, he said. He credited the UAE's active internal and external intelligence services and the good cooperation with the UAE's friends and allies, for "containing" the threat of terrorism.

-- Instability in Iraq: The UAE views the formation of the new Iraqi government as a "step in the right direction," Al Noaimi said, but Iraq is still a work in progress. Iraq requires a national consensus, but that has been elusive thus far, as the difficulty in selecting a cabinet illustrated. "They need to sit together and agree together," he said. Political fragmentation would be dangerous and could lead to infighting among Kurds and among Shi'as, each of which has its own militias. For its part, the UAE has responded by providing political, security, and humanitarian assistance to the Iraqis, and by working with the U.S. and other allies to help restore Iraq's security and stability.

-- Iran: Iran military power and its nuclear weapons ambitions worry the UAE. A nuclear Iran is "unacceptable" to the UAE, Al Noaimi said. Iran's military presence on the Tunbs and Moussa islands threaten trading routes in the Gulf, including the Straits of Hormuz. Al Noaimi noted that the Iranians have been conducting military exercises and training related to mines, sea-to-sea missiles, and small submarines. Iranian military installations and arms on the islands make any tanker or shipping vessel vulnerable to an attack, he said. The UAE deals with Iran using "both the carrot and the stick," although the existence of different factions within the Iranian government complicates discussions, Al Noaimi said. Asked by an NWC student if the UAE would support a military action against Iran, Al Noaimi laughed and said his country "would not oppose it."

-- Saudi Arabia: Tension exists between the UAE and Saudi Arabia over their unresolved common border, but Al Noaimi said he did not see that the dispute over the border will one day escalate into a military conflict. "The temperature could rise and fall, but we will be able to handle it bilaterally or at the Gulf Cooperation Council," he said. "We don't want anything between us and the Saudis that would

be an issue."

-- Middle East peace: The unresolved conflict between Israelis and Palestinians sometimes poses a security threat to the UAE because of the sizable number of Palestinians, Jordanians, and Egyptians living and working in the UAE. "Any major setback in the peace process could affect the population here," Al Noaimi warned. He urged the U.S. to play an impartial role in helping resolve the dispute as that would "remove a major obstacle that is making the U.S. unpopular in the region."

-- UAE victim of its own success: An economic success story, the UAE has proven to be a magnet for many people who want to come to the emirates to improve their economic situation. The UAE's attractiveness has allowed illegal migrants and infiltrators to seep across the country's "uncontrolled borders," either by land or by sea, from Oman and Saudi Arabia, Al Noaimi said.

Reform  
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14. (C) Asked about his views on USG reform initiatives in the region, Al Noaimi acknowledged that the USG's approach to discussing reform had "improved" since the idea of a Greater Middle East initiative was first broached more than a year ago. Emiratis understand that stability and prosperity depend on their acceptance of a system of governance, and that greater political participation, respect for human rights, and the rule of law are all very important principles, he said. Yet, each society is unique, and is not going to accept one-size-fits-all approach. "You can't impose from the outside. It has to develop from society itself," he said of reform initiatives. Political reforms manifest themselves differently in different countries, and should be regarded as an ongoing experiment in this region, he added.

15. (C) Al Noaimi said the UAE was "happy" with its experiment with reform, noting the active discussion in local newspapers and on television talk shows about whether to elect members to the Federal National Council, and the trend toward broadening the role of civil society, including a future role for labor unions. Compared to four decades ago, the UAE's political institutions have evolved considerably, including a stronger role for the executive councils in each of the seven emirates, he said. Al Noaimi said the UAE also has a freer press and respects human rights. The UAE's model of governance appeals to Iraqis, according to an opinion poll Al Noaimi had read. Al Noaimi said he thought that President Bush should speak forcefully about political openness in the region. While there will be those who will interpret this as interference and who may oppose any kind of U.S.-funded reform initiative, others will welcome U.S. encouragement on political openness and any technical assistance the U.S. could offer, he said.

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